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THE REVISED VERSION: "THE
ORACLES OF GOD."

A Lecture

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

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By GEORGE J. WILD, Esq., LL.D.

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SYLLABUS.

1.—A subject embracing so many points of intricate criticism must necessarily in a single lecture be treated cursorily and as a whole.

The Nature of the Book revised. Always hitherto regarded as a Sacred book of infallible authority. Theologians of the minimalist school,—various views of inspiration; neither of these invalidate the authority of scripture as practically used by recognised bodies of Christians, with whose authorised statements it is alone possible to deal. Practically the whole Christian world appeals to us to take scripture as our sure guide.

2.—Sympathy with the alarm of devout persons. Versions;—they frequently vary. Incongruity of the ideas of an infallible revelation and varying versions thereof. Opinions, *in their own words*, of several of the “Revisers,” and other leading divines, on the effect often produced on Versions and Manuscripts by bias and dogmatic prejudice—rendering with a view to edification—chance—attempts at harmonising—intentional falsification and interpolation—dubiousness of meaning.

Reliability of a document must be affected by these incidents.

3.—Attempts to extenuate this difficulty by Christian Apologists. The attempt invalidated by their own arguments from an opposite point of view, and by the vital nature of the doctrines affected by the alterations:—the Trinity—Justification by Faith—Communion in both kinds—The Evil One;—and by the way in which changed views respecting these doctrines affect persons and property. Professor Maurice:—Prosecution of “The Essayists and Reviewers.”

The “trepidation and uncertainty” of the Christian public spoken of by a clergyman are therefore very natural.

4.—Additional Uncertainty warranted by the “Revisers’” own statements about the text. The Three Great Uncials. Destruction of writings in early centuries. Rough behaviour of primitive divines. A question for sincere Christians. The Canon—Four Hundred Years—Eusebius—Dr. Westcott on “instinct.”

5.—Sacred volumes among other races deemed also “oracles of God.” The demons testified of Christ. Reliability of oracles suspected, as sound knowledge increases.

Conclusion. Apology for disturbing popular sentiment; but to destroy vulgar conceptions of the infallibility of scripture is as religious and honest a work in those who think such views detrimental, as is the propagation of the Bible by those who think otherwise. The Gospel of the Future.

THE REVISED VERSION : "THE ORACLES OF GOD."

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—A cursory treatment of such a subject as that proposed to me is all that is possible in a single lecture, so many are the points of view, and so numerous the publications to which it has given rise.

My present purpose is simply to lay before you a few such reflections as might be supposed to occur to any clear-minded and fairly-educated person who considered the subject as a whole ; and I shall only introduce a few of the special points raised by critics and divines as illustrations by the way.

The first question that naturally occurs is "*What is this book,*" the revision of which arouses such interest in every direction ? However vaguely we may recall the lessons of youth, and however much of late years our attention may have been directed to other studies, we cannot but remember that it is a book for which marvellous claims are made, which has had a most remarkable history, and which still exerts a very widespread and powerful influence. It is a book which claims to be a divine gift from God to man : the very names that are continually applied to it by divines of all schools and churches are in fact an assertion of these claims. The "New Testament," or, as critics now say it should rather be called, "The New Covenant ;"—as setting forth the agreement between God and man on the terms of salvation. Other titles, familiar to us, are such as these : "The Word of God" and "The Oracles of God," both adopted from the language of Apostles, "Holy Scriptures," "Revelation," and others, all intended to assert for this book an authority and a position wholly unique and different from that of all other books in the world.

Every one, from his own experience, must be so well aware of the way in which scripture has been hitherto regarded in the Christian communities, that it would be hardly necessary to insist upon this point but for the fact that of late years there has grown up a class of expositors who may be called theologians of the minimalist school. Their notion seems to be that the best method of defending their creed is after the fashion of the animal who escapes from a trap by leaving his limbs behind him. By a process of gradual evisceration they seek to free the Christian scheme from whatever difficulties science or history may discover in it. It may be an artful plan to confound opponents by providing that all their rude

blows shall fall upon a vacuum, and if it pleases these gentlemen to retain the name and style and profess the creed of Christians, emptied of its contents, it is mainly their own concern. Those, however, who hold the greater part of the gospel narratives to be myths, scripture inspired in the same sense as Ovid's metamorphoses, and Jesus an amiable social democrat, burning with the enthusiasm of humanity, and only divine by a figure of speech, are not Christians in the usual sense of the word, although it may suit them to call themselves so. I only allude to them here to say that it is impossible to take note of the nebulous and ever-shifting theories by which it is sought to fence or shelter their position. In discussing the bearing of Christian doctrines it is absolutely necessary for clearness sake to have regard only to those presentations of it put forth by leading Christian bodies and divines of responsible position. If ever the churches in general come to share the views of the minimists, there will be not much left then of the old Christianity to discuss, one way or the other, at least nothing probably that we should care to contend against.

Similar remarks apply in some degree to those defenders of the faith who insist that there is some refined and esoteric meaning of scripture language and doctrine imperceptible by ordinary persons, and who try to baffle their less learned opponents by telling them either that they are treating* "Biblical imagery as scientific prose," or that they "lade Christians with definitions and conclusions which they are nowhere called on to hold," or that they are assuming "that coarse popular religions of the day represent Christianity, or attacking "transient phases of opinion long relinquished." This all sounds very reasonable, and we acknowledge that it would be unfair to impute to modern Christians old or ignorant conceptions which have been abandoned. But then they must have been *really* abandoned. It is all very well for one of our more enlightened bishops, or other speaker at a Church Congress, to put a pleasant face on matters, and open both his hands to science as the true handmaid of religion,—and my well-read clerical friend over an evening pipe, may tell me that such or such a thing only belongs to the "coarse popular religion of the day," that no sensible man thus thinks, and that of course he and his lettered brethren hold nothing of the kind;—but round the corner of the street I turn into some Sunday School, and I find the curate in charge, perhaps my learned friend himself, teaching the actual tital beliefs he had been explaining away, or I enter an adjacent church, and I find much the same thing thought good enough for

* See speeches at Newcastle Church Congress, in *Guardian* October 5 and October 12.

the dear simple-minded mammas and daughters who mostly fill the pews. It is natural, and not unjustifiable, that such double-tongued Christianity should give rise to the suspicion that certain of the clergy would gladly re-rivet on us the old superstitions if only people could be brought to accept them, and that it is only the persistent voice of the free-thinking objector that forces the clerical order to concede so much as they do to reason.

On the other hand, I of course allow that there is a considerable distinction of opinion among genuine Christians. I do not ignore that there are higher and lower views of inspiration. There are those who hold that every word and every letter of the sacred volume were dictated by the Holy Spirit, and those who think there was only such a general providential superintendence as was sufficient to guard against substantial error of fact or doctrine. Liberal theologians, when pressed from the outside with the difficulties of the inspiration theory, have been ready to concede a great deal, and have drawn a variety of fine distinctions between "verbal" and "plenary," "matter and manner," "substance and form," the "essence and vehicle" of a revelation—"the conclusion and the premises" of a scriptural argument, "the doctrine and the literary apparatus" by which it is conveyed. But when they come to the discussion of points of belief, all schools assume a practical infallibility for the precise statements, and even, as the way they use them shows, for short texts and single words of scripture, and especially are they obliged to do so when dealing with their hearers in general. For few are so dull as not to perceive that it must be an extremely risky matter to settle the criterion of distinction and say how much or how little of a passage is of divine inspiration: if we admit the fallibility of parts of scriptural statements, where are we to draw the line? If none but expert logicians and skilled linguists are supposed to be capable of this, scripture for all practical purposes still remains written "in a tongue not understood of the people," as much as when written in Hebrew, Greek or Latin. Whatever certain learned persons may think, therefore, if this theory be plainly put forward, we others, we of the unlettered multitude, cannot but too clearly perceive that we are completely at the mercy of a small priestly or lettered class, or, as Lord Shaftesbury put it, subjected to the tyranny of professors. The Church of Rome, indeed, faces this difficulty by claiming for herself the sole and absolute right of exposition; but she nevertheless, like the Protestant Churches, in combination with her own tradition, holds the Bible as the rule of faith.

We may conclude, therefore, this seeming digression by again

affirming that amongst all really recognisable Christians the scriptures still retain their high prerogative, and that none of those paramount claims are abated which entitle them to be properly styled "the revealed Word of God," or as St. Stephen called them "the living Oracles." In hundreds of learned and elaborate as well as popular discourses, in Cathedral and University pulpits, no less than myriad chapels, we are continually exhorted to "search the scriptures," told that they "will make us wise unto Salvation," to take them "as a guide to our feet and a lantern to our paths," to beware how we "corrupt the Word of God, either by adding thereto or taking therefrom;" while some of the more enthusiastic preachers have not hesitated to apply to the whole scriptures those words of its last page: "if any man add unto the words of this book God shall add unto him the plagues that are written therein, and if any man shall take away from the words of this book God shall take away his part out of the book of life."

Of this remarkable and widely revered book, then, we are now presented with a "Revised Version."

I can well understand and sympathise with the alarm and repugnance of simple believers when they first heard that the venerable volume, whose every verse they had been taught was sacred, was to be exposed to the tampering and pruning of critics. Its beautiful language and identical words were stored in their hearts, linked with the history of their lives, and pregnant with associations and deep meanings breathed but to God alone, and it was agony to think that that language of the soul was to be broken in upon, and those, as they believed, eternal harmonies dislocated and jarred.

For does there not in truth seem something incongruous between the very idea of "a Word of God" and "a revised version" thereof? An inspired Oracle, a divine revelation, which in some way has got so interpolated and wrongly rendered as to require freshly translating and purging of unwarranted parts. Some will be disposed to think that a revelation that can be involved in such risks fails of the very end for which a revelation might be conceived as possible; at any rate that it must be lacking in that definiteness and certainty which the very conception of a divine message seems to imply. For as a renowned divine* once said, "The Holy Ghost sheds pure light, and the truth he teaches hath a language that is always uniform."

To reveal means to unveil, to make manifest or clear, and is opposed to every notion of obscurity, and dark puzzles and conundrums. If indeed, as at the conclusion of his famous Bampton

* Bossuet, *Histoire des Variations des églises Protestantes*, Preface.

Lectures was once wittily said of Dean Mansel, the chief thing that we believe in, in regard to revelation, is *the veil*, it is of course possible to conceive of a matter being revealed with the object of making it darker than before. But this process, in the ordinary use of language, would generally be described as "obscuring" not revealing a matter. A message is brought to the world, professing to give information about the nature and being of its God—the conditions of acceptance with him, the means by which men are to approach him, and the prospects of future happiness or misery. I soon find there are divergent copies of the message. Christians nevertheless aver that it is a revelation which gives precise information on these and other like matters. But when to my zealous enquiries I can get no certain and uniform answer, no answer in which any two agree, in what respect am I better than I was originally? I am left in a region of conjecture and opinion; but I had conjectures and opinions of my own before; and the declared object of the revelation was to dispel such, and establish certainty. If it fails of this has it not failed of its end? The object of a light is to illumine; of a chart to show the track, of an envoy to carry a definite message; if the light only shows "darkness visible," if in the map no sure continuous path can be discovered, if the messenger is so incoherent that we cannot tell whether he refers to Rome or Canterbury, Constantinople or Geneva, what in any case can result but ambiguity and confusion? Now St. Paul tells us that God is not the God of confusion, and his master declares we may know things by their fruits. Judging the churches then by their own standards, what can we say?

How very different a complexion and meaning the mere process of version-making may give to a book is evident from many curious passages of the Septuagint, as compared with the Hebrew bible. Some very suggestive remarks on this subject may be found in the 4th and 5th lectures of Professor Robertson Smith's recent volume on "The Old Testament in the Jewish church."

To the English reader this divergence of version is made easily apparent by comparing the prayer-book and the bible versions of the Psalms. Take for instance two corresponding verses of the 58th Psalm. The prayer-book has it "Or ever your pots be made hot with thorns, so let indignation vex him even as a thing that is raw"—the bible however says "Or ever your pots can feel the thorns, he shall take them away as with a whirlwind, both living, and in his wrath." Many similar instances might be given.

It can be shown, then, that considerable differences exist between versions as a matter of fact. Most persons, I think, will perceive upon reflection that it must have been so from the nature

of the case. For consider only the natural bias or prepossession of each translator derived from his education and mode of thought. Hear, for instance, what the Bishop of St. Andrews, a "Reviser," says on this point. After alluding* to the composition of the Revising Company, with the proportion of Episcopalians and Dissenters, as necessarily influencing in some degree the results, he continues thus: "Bias, of course derived from antecedents, from education, from position in life, and from ecclesiastical associations, through the constitution of our common nature there must needs have been more or less in every case. But I have the fullest conviction that no conscious partiality . . . was allowed in any instance to exercise any sway throughout our proceedings."

So again Mr. Moule,† the well-known Biblical scholar, arguing against the change from "*we have peace with God,*" to "*let us have peace with God,*" in the revised version of the 5th of Romans, goes on to say: "Who can hesitate how to explain the early growth of the reading '*let us have*'? It was the result of an age when the . . . certainties of the Pauline teaching were already exchanged for the mists of a spirit of unauthorised speculation or of misguided ecclesiasticism, both alike beclouding the directness of view and of hold on the part of the Christian towards his Redeemer."

As the three earliest MSS. all agree in the reading "let us have," we perceive that Mr. Moule's estimate of the MSS. even of that age is not a high one.

Speaking of another rendering he says, again, "For this rendering, every critical nerve on one side—under dogmatic prejudice—has been strained." . . . "But for *prepossession against* the idea of the Redeemer's deity, I am perfectly sure that no rendering but that now retained would have occurred to a translator in the first instance."

Similarly the Rev. W. Ewen, B.D.,‡ speaks of "the unconscious dogmatic bias" of the "*Revision Committee*" itself; even venturing to state that they have given us, not "what St. Paul wrote, but what they think he should have written as an orthodox teacher."

Then, again, we have an Oxford M.A. complaining that Dr. Brown,§ one of the Revisers, was led "by dogmatic opinion" . . . "to insist on the use of the pronoun 'who' instead of 'which'" when referring to the Spirit; though the Greek word is neuter, and in English we always say "it" when speaking of a spirit.

* See his address to his Diocesan Synod, *Standard*, Sept. 23, 1881.

† Moule's Comment on Epis. to the Romans, *Public Opinion*, July 9th, 1881.

‡ In a letter to *Public Opinion*, 6th August, 1881.

§ *Public Opinion*, 6th August, 1881.

One gentleman expresses* his conviction that a new revision ought to be made chiefly with a view to edification. Since views of what is edifying differ vastly, this may almost be called erecting prejudice into a principle.

We have more than one intimation of the opinion that in introducing “the Evil one” into the Lord’s Prayer, the revisers were actuated by a laudable desire to restore the doctrine of the personality of the devil, which has been so depreciated of late years. One Rev. gentleman† even broaches the comical idea that the strong dislike expressed by so many persons to this re-introduction of “the Evil one,” arises from the same feeling as Satan’s own rage when he is found out. I know not to what he alludes, unless to some of the old stories about the devil appearing in various disguises, such as lovely women, or beautiful boys, to holy men and being quickly detected; as when St. Dunstan applied his hot tongs to the devil’s nose and sent him off swearing.

I need not trouble you with any more statements from orthodox divines, granting our position as to the large share prejudice must have in the rendering of any version.

This fact alone must of itself very much affect the trustworthiness of any transmitted document.

But our estimate of reliability will have, I think, to be rated still lower, when we consider the element of chance in the transmission of documents—chance including all the risks connected with the stupidity, the laziness, the superstition and misplaced reverence of myriads of copyists. Even in the case of the “Revision” before us, Dr. Sanday, a distinguished critic, allows that chance must have played its part.‡ “In a Committee,” he says, “composed of heterogenous elements . . . results must needs be obtained in a great measure by compromise, and even in the compromises adopted from time to time there will naturally be an element of accident.”

The Bishop of St. Andrews also emphasises§ the fact that the voting system of rendering risks the result of a frequent majority of the least sagacious and able over, as he thinks, a more scholarly minority.

The Dean of Peterborough and others might be cited as witnesses to the same effect.

To the thus allowed effects of prejudice and chance no small addition must be made from the mistaken views taken of the duties

* J. F. S., in *Public Opinion*, 17th Sept., 1881.

† Rev. Mr. Tyrwhitt, *Public Opinion*, 17th Sept., 1881.

‡ *Public Opinion*, 6th August, 1881.

§ *Ib.*, 24th Sept. and 10th Oct., 1881.

of a redacteur in those early centuries. If even nowadays we hear reverend theologians insisting that it is the first duty of a version-maker to translate with a view to edification, irrespective of the weight of evidence for or against any particular reading, what must we suppose to have been the case in those days when the science and duty of historical precision were altogether undreamt of, and a desire "to build up the believers," as they phrased it, "in their most holy faith" was considered, not merely to justify, but to render right and necessary any required amount of perversion.

To this tendency may be traced some of the blundering attempts which were evidently made at an early period to harmonize one gospel with another. The learned Master of University College, Durham, gives us an instance* where even the translators of our Authorised Version were led by this tendency to mistranslate a passage in John in order to reconcile it with the parallel account in Matthew and Mark.

But far greater effect, than by attempts at harmonizing, would be produced by the intentional interpolation and falsification of the text in those first ages of fierce strife.

On this we have the Rev. Mr. Tyrwhitt's† statement respecting a text in Matthew, which, he says, "is a plain indication that deliberate falsification of the evangelist's phrase must necessarily here be charged against one or other of the two sets of conflicting Greek authorities."

Similarly, Dr. Dwight,‡ one of the American revisers, speaking of passages which mention fasting in the Authorised Version, and which are properly excluded from the "Revised," as no part of the true text, so that fasting is now nowhere inculcated as a Christian duty in the New Testament; he observes, "This *manipulating of the text* in the places to which we have made especial reference, shows the tendency of a later time than the apostolic age."

So Professor Sanday§ speaks of a certain combination of manuscripts, namely, the combination "Aleph D," that is the Sinaitic and the Codex Bezae, having "been found to mark a well-defined strain of corruption."

And, here perhaps, it is as well to remark that it makes no difference to our argument whether these gentlemen, in discussing various passages, are right or wrong in the view they take of the particular point before them. We need commit ourselves to none

* His Letter in *Public Opinion*, 1st Oct., 1881.

† *Public Opinion*, 17th September, 1881.

‡ *Ib.* 25th June, 1881.

§ *Ib.*, 6th August, 1881.

of their opinions. It is enough for us that we have a large number—for statements like the above might be infinitely multiplied—a large number of orthodox divines and professed defenders of the faith, agreeing that a great amount of deliberate and accidental corruption of New Testament documents prevailed during the early centuries of our era.

But no small element of uncertainty still remains; it will be found, even in many cases where all parties are agreed as to the original reading, but where the meaning of the Greek is doubtful. For an instance, take a verse in the 3rd chapter of John; commenting on which Professor Plummer* says, “In v. 34, the probably correct *interpretation* of the Authorised Version, ‘God giveth not the spirit by measure unto him,’ is reduced to the correct *translation* ‘He giveth not the spirit by measure.’ The possible rendering, ‘The spirit giveth not by measure,’ is not thought worthy of notice in the margin.”

Here, then, we have three possible renderings of the same Greek the difference of which is not small, at any rate considerable enough to very much alter the bearing of the text in a conceivable doctrinal controversy.

Several of our theological leaders have endeavoured to lessen the sense of uncertainty, perturbing many minds, on account of the omissions and variations of the “Revised Version,” and confessed corruptions of the old, by using some such language as this:—“After all what is the upshot of the whole work? No doctrine of any importance is affected by these corrections; they chiefly refer to small points. Granting that all the errors, and all the corruptions, insisted on by the most trenchant critics are well founded, yet enough remains to establish all the great articles of faith.”

We must take leave, however, to considerably qualify these reassuring and comforting statements⁹.

Indeed, this method of representing the alterations, as of little consequence, is refuted by the language of many of these divines themselves; when, regarding the question from the opposite side, they show the absolute necessity that existed for a revision.

As for instance, Archdeacon Palmer,† one of the revisers, among others, speaking at the Church Congress, argues that, if the defects of the Authorised Version had been only in small matters the public would hardly have endured the experiment of a revision. “But,” he says, “when it is seen that the received text is condemned by a *consensus* of critics in passages which have been used by authors, like Bishop Pearson, to establish important doctrines, and which

* *Public Opinion*, 1st October, 1881.

† *Ib.*, Oct. 22nd, 1881.

must continue to invite like use so long as they stand unaltered in our English bibles, it is impossible to rest satisfied with a version which represents that received text."

He then gives as examples the verse in Tim. (1 Tim., iii. 16), where the words "*He* who was manifest in the flesh," have been converted, in the Authorised Version, to "*God* manifest in the flesh," and the text of the Three Witnesses.

No one can have the face to allege that such texts as these refer only to small points.

The expulsion of the famous text of the Three Heavenly Witnesses must be allowed, on all hands, to withdraw no slight support from the doctrine of the Trinity. This is made plain, if by nothing else, at least by the pertinacity and determination with which it was long fought for in the face of overwhelming evidence, and with which, in some orthodox quarters, it is still fought for. For their ecclesiastical experience and acumen make them instinctively feel that, if it is conceded that the Trinitarian party were so resolute and unscrupulous as to foist in a whole text to back up their beloved doctrine, it raises no unreasonable suspicion, that many other texts, originally of lame inference, have been surreptitiously touched up to meet their argumentative requirements. Those familiar with early Greek writing well know that, in many cases, it would require but the insertion of a mere line an $\frac{1}{8}$ th of an inch long, to convert a sentence, as an authority, from one side of the question to the other.

When we consider that this last-mentioned text is the only one which directly, and in so many words, attested the doctrine of the Trinity in the whole compass of the New Testament, it must be fairly allowed that the adversaries of that tenet have scored a point, when at length it is ignominiously ejected from the sacred text without one word of excuse, condolence, or record of its former presence: the Revisers not having condescended to *notice* it, *even* in the margin. Shades of Travis and Porson, behold, how low this once "glorious pillar of unshaken orthodoxy" has fallen! Once the rallying point of so many* famous champions, and the subject of such hard-fought battles, and now, "None so poor to do it reverence," nay even to bow it out with common civility! If the poor text had language, we can imagine its addressing these ruthless Revisers in the words of the old song,—"*It may have been wise to dissemble your love, but why need you kick me down stairs?*"

Another doctrine, held for many generations to be a vital prin-

* See Dr. Davidson's Introduction to New Testament, Vol. II, p. 307, and Blomfield's Greek Testament, notes in loco.

ciple of Christianity, almost the note of a standing or falling church, is that of “justification by faith.” The rendering of an important text bearing upon this doctrine, which the “Revisers” have thought themselves obliged to adopt, has been strongly condemned by no less an authority than the Bishop of Llandaff,* whose words are that the view of the “Revisers” “is quite subversive of this essential doctrine of Christianity,” and “in direct contradiction to the teaching of St. Paul upon the subject.”

I offer no opinion upon the matter beyond stating that it can hardly be supposed our would-be comforters can, as theologians, call the doctrine of justification a small point, with the recollection of all the mighty tomes which have been written on it, and the endless distinctions hammered out between “*causa efficiens*” and “*causa instrumentalis*,” “*meritum de condigno*,” and “*meritum de congruo*,” and all the rest of it.

Then, again, it is well known how long and internecine was the controversy between the Roman and Protestant Churches on the question of “Communion in both kinds,” and the withholding of the cup from the laity. The present Bishop of Winchester in fact declares,† “that it is a very serious question whether the sacrament is a *valid* sacrament when there is only administered one half of what Christ ordained.”

As all the leading churches agree with that of England that the sacraments are “generally necessary to salvation,” according to this showing the great mass of Romanists are reduced to what Touchstone calls “a parlous state.” So much the greater consequently must be the satisfaction of the Roman authorities when they find that the “Revisers” have thought it right so far to strengthen their view of the question as to translate in accordance with the Vulgate version, the text of the 27th v. of 11th ch. of 1 Cor.: “Whoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord,” instead of as in the Authorised Version: “AND the cup of the Lord.”

In several other instances the Vulgate rendering is approved.

The striking change in the Lord’s prayer of “evil” into “the evil one,” has caused considerable sensation in most Christian bodies, and has led to a long and learned controversy between the Bishop of Durham and Canon Cook.‡ Time precludes further allusion to this matter, but when such illustrious authorities differ so considerably on a point like this, common men may certainly be excused for thinking that the “oracles” cannot be so plain “that he may run that readeth.”

* *Public Opinion*, 17th September, 1881.

† On the Thirty-Nine Articles, Art. XXX., p. 736.

‡ See *Guardians* of September 7 to September 28, inclusive.

These various changes of the "Revised Version" can hardly also be deemed small or immaterial if we consider the probable difference they might have made to persons and parties had they been foreseen and sanctioned earlier. It is now nearly 30 years ago since Professor Maurice was the centre of a theological disturbance in England, and when, after a somewhat acrimonious discussion, chiefly stirred up by Dr. Jelf, he was ejected from his professorship. It will be remembered that the main contest ranged round sundry distinctions of the Professor respecting the word *αἰώνιος*. It can scarcely be doubted that if the standard of information, and the atmosphere of thought which have led the present "Revisers," in EVERY INSTANCE, to translate this word by "eternal," and not "everlasting," had been as prevalent then as now, that there would have been nothing heard of the persecution of poor Maurice—the gentlest and most charitable of men. One, who was totally opposed to him in most respects, still wrote of him at the time in these words: "It is a sorrowful thing to see the fine subtlety, the large and genial culture, the Christian genius and virtues of the Chaplain of Lincoln's-Inn, distorting themselves in vain struggles of ecclesiastical position, and trying, by all sorts of loving ingenuities, that would be unvarnished in any one else, to relax the marble brow of a relentless Church."

A few years later a more terrific storm arose in connection with the attack upon the authors of "Essays and Reviews," which though finally failing in the attempt to expel the Essayists, subjected two of them, at least, to a wearisome and costly prosecution, which if it did not break the heart, at any rate utterly broke the health and spirits of one of them.

It will be remembered that, the proposed "handling" of "scripture as other books," was one of the main sources of trouble. It is probable that a large proportion of those ten or eleven thousand clergy, who signed the remarkable protest against the "Essayists," have gone to their rest; their survivors must by this time, one would think, have got pretty well accustomed to the "free handling" of sacred records, and the work of the "Revisers" must, at least, have taught them that if any approximation can be made to the exact language in which the authors of the New Testament wrote, it can only be by treating the scriptures very much "like other books." The way in which the "Revision" itself has been, for the most part, accepted is a good index of the great change, in the tone of thought, on the subject between now and then. But this very change, this acquiescence in the treatment of "scripture as other books," can hardly be deemed a small or trifling point. It is, in fact, a point which lies at the very root of the whole matter. It

has already pretty well exploded a whole school of theology, in the eyes of all rational men, and I am very much deceived if we shall not, before long, see more remarkable effects. The frantic efforts of late years among many in Protestant Communities, to bolster up, like the Roman Controversialists, the scriptures by the Church and the Church by the scriptures, and the attempt in the Roman Church to prop what is felt to be itself a crumbling buttress, by elevating the dogma of infallibility into a “*vérite du foi*,” are tolerably clear signs that the feeling of insecurity as to the groundwork of the faith is spreading in all quarters.

In view, then, of so many varying expedients for underpinning the faith, and such conflicts of opinion among divines, the letter of a clergyman,* complaining that “many minds at the present time are agitated by a sense of trepidation and uncertainty,” is not surprising. When, for instance, we hear so eminent a theologian as the Bishop of Derry† “declare his profound conviction that St. John makes no such statement” as one which the “Revisers” have put into his mouth; and that it is to be feared the error of the revisers will lead to “serious misapplication” and “misapprehension,” and find other ecclesiastics of high position giving utterance to similar fears, we must grant, I think, that the “trepidation and uncertainty” are not unnatural.

We have hitherto said nothing as to the additional dubiousness attaching to the subject, in regard to the foundation of the Greek text of the Revised Version. The text of the Authorised Version was confessedly very imperfect. The revisers have, in many respects, given us a new one. They tell us, in their preface, that the materials for improving the text have only come to light within the last two centuries, some of them only within the last few years. It follows from this, therefore, that the Christian Church, for the larger part of its existence, that is from the 5th to the 16th century, has had no true text of its divine oracles. The “Revisers” have chiefly leant upon the great Uncial MSS. Some well known scholars have complained that they have not consistently done so. To this the “Revisers” may be said to have replied by anticipation,‡ when they tell us “that it was not within their province to construct a continuous and complete text;” and that, in “many places,” . . . “it would not be *safe for the present to accept* one reading to the absolute exclusion of others.”

In short, their statements come practically to this: that we are

* Rev. Tilney Bassett, *Public Opinion*, 16th July, 1881.

† *Ib.*, 10th September, 1881.

‡ Preface to Revised Version.

still without a true text of the original oracles, and have at present no means of forming one.

And after all what *are* these three great Uncials that are placed up above the other authorities like my Lords *in banco*, in their full-bottomed wigs. Two of them descend, they say, from the fourth century, the other from the fifth. It is notorious that by that time corruptions had sprung up in the church in all directions. It was a period of the greatest rascality, unscrupulousness, lying, and self-seeking, besides dire confusion among both the lay and clerical orders, as is admitted even by ecclesiastical historians themselves. Certainly it is not a creditable era to date from, and a pedigree commencing in such a period is surely not unquestionable.

It appears to me a very suspicious circumstance too, that we have no MS., at least of some of the separate books, higher than the date named. The preceding period was one of violent and cruel controversy, and we know that religious antagonists did not stick at trifles in those days, as witness one early council where the stronger party pummelled their adversaries to that extent that they were obliged to take refuge under the seats ; and at Ephesus one leading bishop was so knocked about that he died a few days afterward. Are these, we cannot help asking, are these the calm sages and the holy fathers on whose authority we are to accept the mysteries of religion, and to whose sagacity and fidelity we are to trust for the preservation of its evidence ? Temperate and precise statement might as reasonably be looked for in a meeting of howling dervishes, or rowdies of the New York slums. At any rate, gentlemen so little ceremonious with the persons of their adversaries, would not be very particular as to their books, and they had apostolic precedent for burning reprobated writings. As they would not scruple to destroy books, so they would not hesitate either to interpolate them, or to ascribe them to others than their real authors. We have positive evidence that this was the case in some instances, and we have no doubt in many others also if we could only unearth the facts. It is not likely that the three great Uncials, derived to us from this turbulent and unwholesome era, have escaped the general contamination. Since these remarks were written, I have had the pleasure, last week, of reading the terrific onslaught made upon the Uncials by the current "Quarterly Review." The reviewer gives them the very worst of characters. I am happy to be so far in accord with him. He should, in consistency however, have told his readers that the character of the MSS. on which the Authorised Version is founded is even worse. The joke of the matter is, that he evidently imagines himself to be lending valuable support to orthodoxy. The more prudent of the orthodox will, I

think, be ready to cry “heaven save us from our friends.” The remarks which he ascribes to Tischendorf on Codex D, “*Sœpe dubites,*” &c., “You may often doubt whether you are reading things written seriously or in jest,” seem appropriate, I think, to the reviewer himself. These well-abused Uncials are, however, the best and earliest MSS. that can be obtained, and we have seen how greatly their authority has been allowed to amend the version hitherto in use in this country.

A question here arises which we should think of serious importance to such Christians as take their religion in earnest. And that is, “What guarantee have you that this revision is final?” The “Revisionists” themselves tell you that they are not in a position to certify a perfect text, and that they look for improvement to the course of time and further research. What guarantee have you that time has not some great surprise in store? Suppose, for arguments’ sake, a MS. of some New Testament books turned up of the end of the second century, or suppose that even the identical parchments left at Troas were unearthed. And further, suppose that as of late the comparison of the later with the earlier manuscripts has led to the suppression or alteration of more than one crucial text, so the comparison with those still earlier showed that sundry other passages, upon which theologians have raised their elaborate edifices, had either been greatly corrupted, or had no existence at all. It cannot justly be said that by scholars this is held an impossible supposition, seeing that our most eminent critics, Messrs. Scrivener and Hort, and others, who agree with them, tell us, in so many words,* “that the worst corruptions to which the New Testament has ever been subjected originated within a hundred years after it was composed.”

This question of the untrustworthiness of the text brings us naturally to the subject of the Canon itself.

I conclude that all here understand that by “the Canon” is practically meant *the list* of books that were eventually received and held for inspired scripture.

When, then, was this canon finally settled? All competent scholars agree that it was not settled until the Council of Carthage, near the end of the fourth century, and even after that there were differences of opinion as to certain books.

And here it will be as well for us to try and realise, in some degree, the significance of the statement, “the end of the fourth century.” For from the way in which it is often referred to by re-

* See Scrivener’s Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament, chap. vii. p. 453; and see the whole chapter for many facts confirmatory of the statements of this lecture.

ligious writers and speakers, it is evident that many Christians conceive that when they have got up to the fourth century, they have got to the very primal fount and origin of Christianity, and taste the pure celestial spring. Let us rectify this conception a little by applying as a measure the course of our own national history. Now four centuries deducted from the present year of grace will take us back, barring fractions, to the year 1480, near the beginning of the last quarter of the fifteenth century.

How many events have changed the face of the world since then? The world was then still "*orbis veteribus notus*"—"the world as known to the ancients," as the schoolbooks say. Neither America nor the Cape of Good Hope had been discovered; printing had only just been brought to England; the Roman Church was still dominant; exactly fifty years will pass before the protest of Luther and the German princes at Spires; Loyola and his famous society are not yet in existence; the Wars of the Roses are not yet over; for several generations yet to come Scotland and England will be still two countries; the first and the second English revolutions are distant, and the French yet far away in the future; the present English language had hardly yet been formed; we must wait longer than a century for Shakespear's immortal pen; and, what perhaps is more to our present purpose, the English Bible was not yet extant, Tindal's not appearing for over another fifty, and the Authorised not before 130 years.

One of the arguments used by some to deprecate the Revised Version before us was, as you will remember, that the fine idiomatic English of the older book had so worked itself into English literature and speech, that to change it would be almost like changing our forms of thought. But the great bulk of that English literature has itself grown up nearly within the last 300 years, during which period also our religion has been changed, our liberties have been purchased, and we have grown from a small kingdom occupying part of an island to the widest spread and most flourishing race the world has yet seen.

Such great changes, such modifications of institutions, arts, and manners, such powerful revolutions of thought and belief, have occurred in the last 400 years. And can we conceive that during the first four centuries it was otherwise? that the world was then standing still, and that notions and beliefs of the year 50 were stereotyped, and had submitted to no corruption and no change by the year* when Theodosius I. published the Edict of Thessalonica, and established the Catholic Faith with the sword? On

* A.D. 380. Other edicts and violent persecutions followed between 380 and 394 A.D.

the contrary, there was probably never a period of greater change and greater fermentation of thought. The Hellespont and the Eastern Mediterranean were crowded with an incessant traffic, and East and West were being brought together as never before: races were intermingling, and a persistent fusion of all kinds of superstitions and fanaticisms, rituals, religions, and philosophies, was taking place and daily developing. Is it not perfectly certain that the Christianity which resulted from all this, and such Christian literature as was allowed to survive, must be strongly impregnated with the atmosphere from which it drew its breath? It may be difficult to track all the stages of the process, since we have no direct Ecclesiastical history of those times before Eusebius, writing in the first third of the fourth century; and he distinctly avows* that he holds it the duty of a Christian historian to suppress matters unfavourable to his cause, and to write with a view to edification. Other information is chiefly incidental in works mostly of a rhetorical or hortatory nature. Heretical writings, which might have given us a little more light, were systematically extirpated. But the conclusion, I think, must be obvious to every intelligent mind that whatever resulted from those ages must have been largely affected by their spirit, and that the Canon no more than other things escaped.

The canon was practically settled, as we have seen, by the end of the fourth century, and by the party which remained finally dominant after many struggles.

We of course do not deny that a gradual agreement as to the chief books had been growing during the two centuries preceding; but on the question what modification these books received in the process darkness rests. Those who influenced the selection were mostly a very ill-informed and superstitious sort of persons, with minds, as Canon Westcott says,† “essentially uncritical.” It would be easy, did time allow, to give many instances of their puerile and ridiculous style of argument. In the immediate post-apostolic age the early writers, when they speak of scripture, mean the scriptures of the Old Testament. By degrees certain other writings, supposed to have been the work of their first leaders, grew into respect from being read in the Christian assemblies; but distant and different churches had not always the same, each gloried in its own special books; much in the same way as in later times this shrine would be famous for one relic, and that for another. Amidst incessant conflicts and discussions and the

* Eusebius, *Hist. Ecc.*, viii. 2, and see *Præparatio Evangelica*, xii. 31.

† Westcott on the Canon, Introduction, p. 10, and see M. Nicolas’ “*De la formation du Canon*,” in his “*Etudes Critiques sur le Nouv. Test.*,” *passim*.

assertion of various claims, the dominant party at length came to a *tolerably* harmonious settlement ; but it is not to be denied that books long spoken against are now included in the canon, and books that were once accepted are now cast out. The Muratorian Canon, for instance, rejects the Catholic Epistles of Peter, John, and James, and introduces a book called "The Apocalypse of Peter." It is a somewhat significant fact that the first known Canon is that of Marcion, extremely defective according to orthodox views. The only accounts we have of Marcion are from his adversaries, and therefore suspicious. One fact about him, however, is sufficiently certain, and that is that he protested against the acceptance of many books afterwards received, and that he had a different gospel. It is probable that the final result somewhat depended upon the principle of "give and take." At any rate, as Dr. Westcott allows* the Canon was "not definitely marked" out by any special investigation, but "was fixed practically by the common use of Christians ; it was formed," says he, "by an instinct, not by an argument." As he and Dr. Hort tell us again,† in the notes to their recently issued Greek Testament, "instincts" are extremely various. There were, it cannot be denied, a great many warring instincts in those early centuries, and it may be permitted to question how far the one that finally prevailed was more likely to be trustworthy than the others.

Regarding then the subject from these several points of view—the unavoidable bias of version-makers, the conflicting views of meaning, the enigmatical nature of many statements in themselves, the well-meant attempts at harmonizing, the unavoidable deterioration and corruption of the text, added to the wilful interpolation and falsification of the text, the suspicious destruction of documents by the finally dominant party, and in addition to all this the extreme haze and precariousness which surround the whole history of the Canon itself—have we not said enough to justify the assertion with which we started, that the idea of a revision is incongruous with that of a divine revelation ; that a "revelation" transmitted by such means and subject to such drawbacks, must be of necessity involved in such an atmosphere of uncertainty and doubt as to fail of the purposes for which a conceivable revelation might be made.

Is it conceivable that the Bright Intelligence that shines throughout the Universe is so wanting in resource, as to make a message of mercy to a supposed perishing world dependent on "the rendering of a particle," the blotting of a letter, or the blunder of a scribe?

* Westcott on the Canon, p. 413, and p. 537.

† Westcott and Hort's Greek Test., p. 542.

As for that poor plea which has been put forward by a northern Professor, who argues that if Providence has allowed his Word to be incrustated with errors, Providence has also preserved to our times the means of correcting them—thus giving us the delightful opportunity of resorting to “critical processes,” and exercising our skill in the solution of difficulties—it seems to me that to impute such a roundabout and ensnaring plan to Providence is anything but respectful and complimentary. Moreover, it is not true, as I have shown the most eminent critics confess, that *we have yet* the means of rectifying the mass of corruptions to which the scriptures have been subjected. It is a pitiable spectacle to see a man of intellect driven by the necessities of a baseless theory to adopt such a miserable evasion.

And let me remind you again, that all the statements and admissions I have adduced and on which my argument is founded, are not those of opponents and freethinkers, but of stout defenders of the faith, mostly divines and scholars of eminence. Many confirmatory facts may be found in Drs. Westcott and Hort’s recently published introductory volume to their Greek Testament. St. Luke tells the Excellent Theophilus, that the object of his writing to him was that he “might know the certainty” of the things he had been taught. Whatever effect was produced upon his first reader, assuredly the opposite effect gains ground with the Theophilusses of later times, who, in every fresh reading and revision, find some new sources of doubtfulness. Will a hundred channels of *incertitude* when combined, bring forth certainty? Or not rather, like combinations in general, when taken all together, produce a total of uncertainty absolutely incalculable. What wonder then at the histories of thousands of different opinions, wrangled over by divergent sects and doctors? If a system had been specially devised to produce this polychromatous result, could it have succeeded better?

Sometimes it is said in mitigation of this statement, that though certainty is unattainable on many points on which Christians differ, yet that it is to be found on all essential points. This fallacy I have already alluded to. I need only further say, how can those points be declared unessential over which Churches have lived in eternal conflict, and filled the world with wars, massacres, and martyrdoms? If they were, after all, really unessential, Christianity stands by that very fact, I fear, condemned before God and man.

In all nations of the world at a certain stage of progress, we find men weakly anxious to penetrate beyond those things that can be known, to claim superior Beings for their patrons, and to

read the future. This tendency of the human mind has made men readily credulous of all sort of revelations and scriptures, Zend and Buddhist, Sibylline books and other oracles, of Jove, Asclepius, or Apollo, which to their votaries in those days were verily "Oracles of God." In a further stage of progress the more intelligent classes of a community begin to ask themselves and one another awkward questions, and find it very difficult to get satisfactory answers. Then comes the stage of public discussion, and more or less open literary assault on ancient faiths and observances. As for instance,* Oinomaos of Gardara, in disgust, we are told, with the ambiguous reply of an oracle to himself, put forth a treatise, in which, among others, he thus ridicules the deity of Delphi,—“Why do you make sport of us with your doubtful sayings; have you not at least gumption enough to perceive that we are coming to see that you do not know what to answer (to our questions) and think by pompous nonsense to cast a mist before our eyes? What good are you doing at Delphi, wasting time chanting your trumpery prophecies? What fools we all are to offer you so many sacrifices!”

While the wiser heathen, however, thus detected the fraud in their oracles, some of the early Christians supposed that they were true, and attributed them to demons, their theory being that the demons “stole from the writings of the prophets a knowledge of things to come.” Some Christians, indeed, seem to have concocted *imaginary* oracles in support of their own views. Eusebius pretends to an oracle affirming the doctrine of the Trinity; Nicephorus† gives an account of one which testified directly of Jesus Christ. This notion of making the devils testify to Christ, you will remember has found its way into the New Testament;‡ the writers apparently not perceiving that it somewhat conflicted with the argument put into Christ’s mouth in another place about Satan being divided against himself.

However, at last comes the day when oracles are dumb, and one after another Sibylline books get discredited. A certain amount of discomfort and social disorganisation is probably unavoidable as new notions displace old ones. As long as there are influential classes personally interested in the maintenance of the *status quo*, there will never be freedom from the risk of able and ambitious individuals taking advantage of popular ignorance to stir up reaction in-favour of the old. And while large masses of a population remain mentally uncultivated, and in a low condition of material welfare there is no security that some fresh and worse delusion may not ground itself upon ancient ones, and spread through a race

* Eusebius *Præparatio Evangelica*, v. 21, and seq. and vi. 7.

† Cited in Vandale’s *Treatise on Oracles*.

‡ Mark III. Luke IV.

like an epidemic. History shows us more than one instance of this fact, which philosophers in their studies are sometimes too apt to forget. It is the part of all wise men, as it seems to me, when old faiths are crumbling, to hasten on the mental and material improvement as rapidly as possible. Nor should it be forgotten that if they would free mankind from old fond conceptions and prevent their revival in aggravated forms, they must, as Mr. Frederic Harrison pointed out in a late able address, find something to fill the aching void which will give scope for the affections and emotions as well as the intellectual part of man.

In conclusion, let me say that it must not be supposed that my remarks are intended in any spirit of hostility to the bible itself.

As a notable literature, helping largely to the study of human experience and mental progress, and containing much fine poetry and moral apologue, there are few books more estimable. But when used, as mainly hitherto, for the manufacture of infallible creeds, for the armoury of frenzied delusions, and as an excuse for "dealing damnation round the land,"—when, in short, it is transformed from a parable of man, into an "oracle of God," instead of a blessing, it becomes a scourge to the world.

To do what little in one lies to remove this misconception seems to me a benevolent and religious work. As contributing thereto I hail the publication of the "revised version."

Some people say, "As the influence of the Scripture is so widespread, is it not better to let it remain unchallenged, to take advantage of it as a channel for instruction, and by frequent accommodation adapt it gradually to the developing knowledge of mankind?" Leaving aside for the present the consideration that the Scripture having been convicted of a mistaken theory of life and human action cannot be a lasting and safe basis of social welfare and progress,—it is enough now to answer, that the exorbitant claims so long asserted for it render it difficult, if not impossible, to place it in a modified position which shall yet be an authoritative one.

Like Cæsar's wife, a supernatural messenger must be above suspicion; a supposed infallible guide, once caught tripping, even when he gives sound information, will hardly gain credit. Suspicion among the ill-informed quickly becomes exaggerated, and then arises the danger that those who have based their faith and duty on a supposed infallible volume, when they "find out" their oracle, will be apt to discard faith and duty altogether.

It may be easier, for the nonce, to rest in some temporary accommodation of the popular theology, and it may be a long process to introduce sounder principles, but eventually it will be found the safer and surer one in a social point of view.

The Gospel of Science and humanity may not seem at first to give scope for such fond hopes and afford such marvellous prospects as a supernatural revelation, but it has the advantage, that the lapse of time tends to confirm instead of contradict it, and that as it never *claimed* the attributes of an infallible and perfected scheme, so it has nothing to dread from any fresh light or manifestation. It only opens its record to the patient, slowly and page by page, as man's increasing experience enables him to read it, and if any words are there suggesting error, it not only gives us leave, but it commands us, by our allegiance to truth, to efface them. There is no finality about our gospel, and no vain retrospection: no world and no atom for it is "lost," what "Salvation" it contains embraces the Universe, the immortal mind of man shall never tire reading its evolving scroll, like the path of the just, ever more luminous, "shining more and more unto the perfect day." Let us look forward to the time when all men shall learn to read the true "living oracles," the Universe and the mind and heart of man:—When invitations to sacrifice at inferior shrines shall be met with the grand words of Cato,* advised when in danger, to appeal to the Temple of Ammon:

"Est ne Dei Sedes, nisi terra, et pontus et aër
Et cœlum, et virtus? Superos quid quærimus ultra?" &c.

Thus versified by Rowe:

"Is there a place which God would choose to love
Beyond this earth, the seas, yon heaven above,
And virtuous minds,—the noblest throne of Jove?
Why seek we further, then?—Behold around
How all thou see'st does with the God abound,
Jove is alike in all, and always to be found!"

* Lucan. Pharsal. ix.

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